

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (previously presented): A flexible support apparatus comprising:

- 5 a support base having an opening in one surface; -
- a mounting bracket having an opening in one surface; and
- a permanently bendable continuously solid metal rod having a first end installed in the
- opening of the support base and fused directly thereto with a weld joint formed directly between
- 10 the first end of the metal rod and the support base, and having a second end installed in the
- opening of the mounting bracket and fused directly thereto with a weld joint formed directly
- between the second end of the metal rod and the mounting bracket.

Claim 2 (previously presented): The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the metal rod is of substantially constant diameter between the first and second ends thereof.

- Claim 3 (previously presented): The apparatus of claim 2 wherein each of the opening in the
- 15 support base and the opening in the mounting bracket further comprises a second larger opening
- into which opposite ends of the flexible sheath are inserted.

Claim 4 (cancelled)

Claim 5 (previously presented): The apparatus of claim 3 wherein each of the support base and the mounting bracket are formed of an ultrasonically weldable plastic material.

- 20 Claim 6 (original): The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the metal rod further comprises a solid metal
- rod formed of a material selected from the group of materials comprising: aluminum, copper, and
- copper coated with another metal material.

Claim 7 (original): The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the first and second ends of the metal rod further comprise an upset metal finish.

Claim 8 (currently amended): The apparatus of claim 4-3 wherein each of the metal rod, the support base and the mounting bracket are formed of a material that is metal-to-metal weldable by conventional means.

Claim 9 (previously presented): A flexible support apparatus for supporting heavy objects relative to a fixed surface, the flexible support apparatus comprising:

a support base having a substantially tubular aperture;

a mounting bracket having a substantially tubular aperture; and

a permanently bendable continuously solid metal rod having a first end inserted into the tubular aperture of the support base and having a weld joint formed therebetween, and a second end inserted into the tubular aperture of the mounting bracket and having a weld joint formed therebetween.

Claim 10 (previously presented): The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the support base and mounting bracket are both formed of an ultrasonically weldable plastic material, and the weld joints formed between the metal rod and each of the support base and the mounting bracket further comprise ultrasonic weld joints.

Claim 11 (original): The apparatus of claim 10 wherein the first and second ends of the metal rod further comprise upset surface material.

Claim 12 (original): The apparatus of claim 11 wherein the metal rod further comprise a metal rod formed of a material selected from the group of materials comprising: aluminum, copper, and copper coated with zinc.

Claim 13 (original): The apparatus of claim 9 wherein the metal rod, support base and mounting bracket are formed of aluminum.

Claim 14 (original): The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising a flexible plastic sheath disposed around the metal rod between the support base and the mounting bracket.

Claim 15 (original): The apparatus of claim 14 wherein each of the support base and the mounting bracket further comprises a respective counter-bore substantially concentric with the respective tubular aperture and sized to admit the flexible plastic sheath.

5 Claim 16 (currently amended): A method for forming a flexible support apparatus, the method comprising:

forming a support base having a tubular aperture therein;

forming a mounting bracket having a tubular aperture therein;

~~welding~~ fusing a first end of a length of permanently bendable continuously solid metal rod
10 in the tubular aperture of the support base; and

~~welding~~ fusing a second end of the length of permanently bendable continuously solid
metal rod in the tubular aperture of the mounting bracket.

Claim 17 (currently amended): The method of claim 16 wherein:

forming a support base further comprises molding a support base of an ultrasonically weldable plastic material;

15 forming a mounting bracket further comprises molding a mounting bracket of an ultrasonically weldable plastic material; and

~~welding~~ fusing first and second ends of the metal rod in the respective tubular apertures of
the support base and mounting bracket further comprises ultrasonically welding the first and
second ends of the metal rod in the respective tubular apertures of the support base and mounting
20 bracket.

Claim 18 (previously presented): The method of claim 17, further comprising upsetting the metal around first and second ends of the metal rod prior to welding.

Claim 19 (previously presented): The method of claim 18 wherein:

forming a support base having a tubular aperture therein further comprises forming a
25 second tubular aperture therein that is of larger diameter and is substantially concentric with a first tubular aperture having the metal rod welded therein;

forming a mounting bracket having a tubular aperture therein further comprises forming a second tubular aperture therein that is of larger diameter and is substantially concentric with a first tubular aperture having the metal rod fused therein; and

5 installing a flexible sheath around the metal rod by inserting opposite ends of the flexible sheath into the respective second tubular apertures.

Claim 20 (previously presented): The method of claim 16 wherein:

forming a support base further comprises forming a support base of a weldable aluminum material;

10 forming a mounting bracket further comprises forming a mounting bracket of a weldable aluminum material; and

further comprising forming the metal rod of a weldable aluminum material.

Claim 21 (original): The method of claim 20, further comprising installing a flexible sheath around the metal rod.